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THE CERTIFICATE

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A SUMMER'S FANCY

A SUMMER'S FANCY

by

Edmund Blunden

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PREFACE

THE following piece was written in 1922, when the War had only just receded from our daily lives. I have lightened a few of its tints, but it belongs to 1922. Neither the conditions which led me to attempt such an expression, nor the power of regarding things as I then did, are likely to recur ; it is a relic, and I admit a partiality for relics. If that is not much of an apology, I may add that some of those who like my verse have asked me whether I would not publish something more in evocation of the country spirit which they were chiefly taken with ; and here perhaps their friendly wish will be gratified.

My verse has gone its own way, and, if I were to state what its purpose chiefly is, I should say the wider rendering of sensibilities, appreciations, and the inward and fugitive music of existence ;—but, if it is replied that I should do far better to stick to village life, peacefully and carefully painted, I am not wholly unhappy. To do that well is as hard, and probably as valuable, as the other. But such questions are settled by life, not by the poet, nor by any of those technical disputants who outsoar our night.

E. B.

A SUMMER'S FANCY

THE time and place agree; each leaf has grown
A spirit, claiming one of life's kind hours;
The slow weir water has that undertone,
The willow-wood exerts her elfin powers.
Here muse with me, breathe, live the life of flowers
For once, if fate say once: and let us find
Ourselves adance with wandering dream, as flowers are with the wind.

Is age not beautiful? How many years
Have fashioned this my valley, that I yearned
To haunt anew,—and came at last in tears
And with my dear made mute by joy returned!
More beauty even than I before discerned

Dwells in this country, since my dear
has sighed
Astonishment of gladness at the grace her
coming spied.

Here, in the circle of these giants green,
The sward lies softly yet, the men and
boys
Come in cool light to drive their wickets
in—
My father and grandfather shared those
joys ;
The Psalmist bade them make a cheerful
noise.
And even a game is an immortal thing ;
Memory's forgotten when boys first played
cricket on this ring.

Still drifting groups of cows in glossy red
And creamy white wake summer's fancy
here ;
On chestnut roots the cowboy rests his
head
Or dabbles in the shallows past the weir ;
The herds drift through their sun-lagoon
each year
As sure as boys to idle boys succeed—
How will you know the year by those ?
What says the rock or reed ?

Over such tardy centuries from his knoll
The church tower ever gazes change to shame
Until blue heaven shrinks like a burning scroll;
The bridge with his sharp arches means the same,
'Let no change come'; the heart allows his claim.
The summer paradise which now we view
Was paradise when Christian church, when Tudor bridge were new.

I was a reed that whispered here, a stone
That made the water talk; these sunny leas
Were my wide world; and is that spell clean gone
When I was natural here as those brown bees,
When nymph-songs echoed on the blossomed breeze,
And my first friend and I could make one day
Adventurous eternity with wandering by the way?

Him we have seen ; I sought, and found
more light,
Assured how life has blessed his patient
worth
With the fair bride that seems a spirit
white
And yet true daughter of this homely
earth.
So smilingly sits peace beside their hearth,
It is as sweet a tale as I have scanned,
It seems the song and will of all the muses
of this land.

For as you know, he was my earliest
friend ;
An unambitious and a glorious name.
And though asunder our late journeys
tend,
I keep my thoughts ; they were one and
the same.
Unless he played, the zest went from
the game.
At setting out, the path and pilgrim too
Are fresh ; they fall in love ; so stands he
in my life's review.

Now as I con these levels greenly
glowing,

Whose hizzing grassy revels drowse our ear,
These clouds about high heaven lazily going,
This drizzling runnel silvering down the weir,
I in my former union reappear,
With him again on sunshine holidays,
And our proud seasons with a music pass before my gaze.

Young Spring, O help us be as we were then;
Where wakens Wonder more than in the feel
Of breast-warm eggs, of greenchub or wise wren,
And nest smoother than silk? and who could steal
Those tiny cradles where the angels kneel?
We let the leaves enfold them, and went on,
And locked our secret up and mourned when any nest was gone.

Spring's primrose said goodbye to thick-grown brakes,

But summer built us houses in the hay.
Summer could triumph over danger's lakes,
That high suns dwindled into creviced clay.
Chin-deep in brooks danced summer-time away
Under the bowing willows and would run
Naked as Hottentots and rouse the mild cows in the sun.

Thence, with slow work, sleep of September fell,
And cockerels made it autumn hour by hour;
Bonfires were come, and acorns in the dell;
The clear noon called to climb the belfry tower
By the dark stairs and spy out, shine or shower,
Hop-lands in blue smoke wreathed, and close below
Peaked awkward roofs, and yards and cotes where we dared never go.

One day comes winter blowing on his nails,
Leading long jingling teams from black-barned farms;

Down died the icy sun in unknown vales,
But many met to mock his red alarms—
The moon, the skaters, and the pollards'
arms !
Quick as the apple's taste, and golden-clear
As willow-leaves came Christmas and the
best bells of the year.

Sometimes another gave us company,
If gentler pastime pleased her ; long we
praised
Nell's happy skill of silent amity,
That said she chose us while her blue
eyes gazed
On each discovery that our spirits raised:
And I remember when their love began—
The posy-rhymes she sent him, that in
roses, violets, ran.

The joy that childhood sweethearts
tremble to !
The shy looks telling love that has no
guile !
As in a primrose rests the happy dew,
So his look shone content into her new
smile ;
That peeped as fearless and as shy
meanwhile

As ever primrose in the hazel shade,
Where winds come not, and free they bloom, yet trembling seem afraid.

But none the less I was the partner still
Of all his happy hours and he of mine;
The later love's arising comes to chill
Much elder kindness into hurt decline,
Fidelity is left to peek and pine
While splendid passion wins the soul's last pains—
Child love knows no such argument, nor brings the golden chains.

See, there's a hawthorn whose gray hornëd boughs
Make a rude dome, whereunder sheltering ewes
Have beaten a bare floor; there we would house.
Our wealth was blackhearts cold with orchard dews
And diamond plums in turn; we told our news,
Which she would sometimes answer with her rhymes,
Till all the buttercups were gold that purchased fairy-times.

But should I count my memory's jewels
all?
You have their kindred in your heart as
well,
You see the very homes of my recall,
May know the two friends and shy-
smiling Nell.
You see, for so in your first hopes it fell,
Time all too soon, swift time that masqued
so slow,
Dimming the crystal light and pointing
roads that we must go.

So now our schoolbooks, that had been
till now
Companions almost welcome as our play,
Assumed the tyrant: burdened the pale
brow,
As learning droned all through the
anxious day
And in the evening robbed our sports
away.
We trudged together through that
thorny ground,
And in far hopes of praise or prize some
consolation found.

Truly our hearts drooped by the way,
to hear

The din of luckier playmates homeward bound
While we were sitting in our torment there,
And dimly pondering over much new-found
Abracadabra; and black-capped and gowned
The sour-tongued master stared and hovered nigh—
The surly good old man with whom such fire and faith would die.

These bonds with use became no bonds at all,
The dark enigmas vanished one by one.
And leisure grew as sweet as it was small:
In learning's honour we gave place to none.
Where old mates shivered with a shotless gun
A-scaring crows, or led the haywain's team,
We passed on with our heads awhirl with learning's rainbow gleam.

Pleasure of pleasures, then how grandly rung

The winter storm first read from
Thomson's pen;
And in enchanted hour for us he sung
His drowsy castle in the wizard's glen.
We read and knew; we said the lines
again
When the wind sobbed through slatting
trees, and skies
Hurled their dun rains; we saw his dream
in June's white woolpacks rise.

So journeying and so following graver
thought,
We seemed to part from what had been
before,
Setting our punier ecstasies at naught
And towards our elders turning more and
more.
What triumph might not manhood have
in store?
Even his Nell awhile seemed as bygone
As hoops and tops and every toy that once
we doted on.

She, wondering first with sorrow at her
lips
That he no longer ran with her a-maying
And their late meeting joy was in eclipse,

Soon knew his mind, his innocent delaying,
And with her own friends was contented playing ;
Made no vain cry upon his solitude.
Days grew to months and months were years before the rest renewed.

Moon-like she gathered grace ; she was an elf
Well-beloved long for being so charming-young—
Now she was one praised for her blossoming self
Whose promise was a theme for many a tongue :
And all she did, sewed, 'broidered, danced or sung
Was by good people marked with honeyed phrases,
And well her rounded rosy cheeks agreed with all their praises.

Many were fair, and she the fair of many,
At flower-show-day, a day that stood as proud
In even a scholar's calendar as any :
Many the young girls were among the crowd

Petalled in white like spirits from a cloud,
To sweethearts bolder wooing bolder glancing
When the day's music burst abroad and the hobby-horse was dancing.

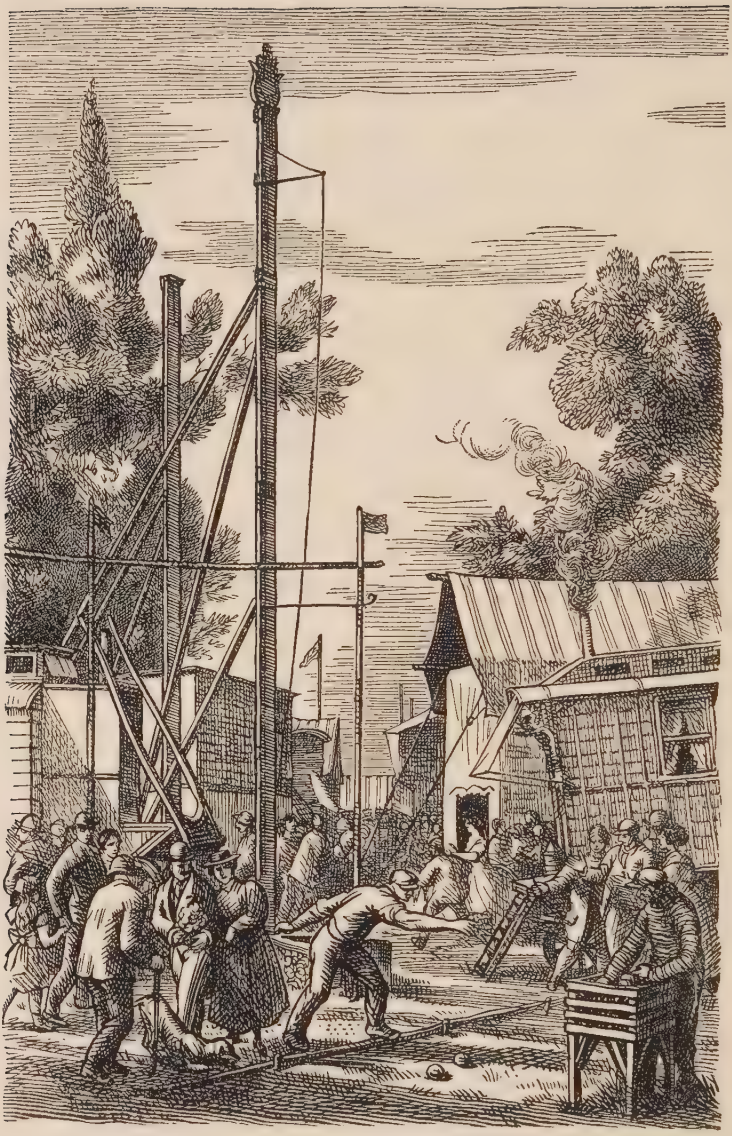
On such a day one year, my friend and I
Were reconnoitring the field's gaudy plan,
Debating what to visit by and by,
King of the Ring, or Europe's thinnest man—
After the roundabouts' grand clang began,—
When through the gate came Nell and with her came
Her cousin Will from Parham Green, vain as a stack aflame.

'This needs no words; the day is ours,' said I,
And he put out the matter from his mind,
For the brass revel bawled at the rich sky
And blaring organs lured the half-inclined,

And swingboats soared, and ochred zanies whined
From stalls where vases gilt with mermaids glintered,
And giant heads showed clay-pipe grinders waiting to be splintered.

Here spectral folks, who'd never been in trains,
Paused nodding through the gardeners' marquee;
Tapping of shoulders hailed young fellows' pains,
Whose labels claimed egg-plum or picotee.
Among them crushed small bodies that would see
Their penmanship evoke some 'Yon's' of praise
Or picture worked in yellow silks hold granny's partial gaze.

Then to the waggon-rail squire stooped ringed hands,
And with some sheepish prelude got by heart
Disgorged the prizes: then, hey! for the stands,



The tumbling skittles, and the jabbing dart.
Oaks sighed for evening, still noised folly's mart,
Her lamps flared fierce, her trumpet-blasts buzzed high,
Feigned shrieks, toy guns, and rattles clashed, and the glare lit up the sky.

Even that grew into music as we went
Home by the bridge and falling brook's sweet smell;
In his half-silence I could read the event;
And the next Sunday saw my friend and Nell
Meet by the church door at the minute bell,
And after from the trooping congregation
Hastening across the stiles in serious talk and meditation.

Thenceforth in his bright speed and carelessness
He told the stones or grass he trod to hear,
'I love my love: my love loves me no less,

Speed on, old Clock, and wed me to my dear ;'
When larks up leapt with silver leer-a-leer,
Would toss his cap up, answering their acclaim :
And in Nell's bluebell eye now lovely gleams and twinklings came.

That tale of magic, written in their looks,
And in their hearts, never in words revealed,
We might seek still in the many vantage-nooks
That nature sets about the wooing weald,
Green nooks where beauty pillows her, concealed
From light-come, light-gone eyes, but beckoning clear
Through casements of embosoming leaves to those with hearts for her.

They stole away ; the evening star has seen,
Doubt not, their love-watch at the silent mill,
Where mated swans rowed over waters green

And sunset throned young birches on the hill.
They stole away, and heard the windgod trill
Winging the corn that to the bright west rolled
A newfoundland! on whose far bourn brown oaks were branched with gold.

And how the calm vast presence of delight
Moved by them in the love-seen earth and air
And how their hearts knew love the infinite,
And loved as in a vision—we, my fair,
Need no conjecturing similes to share.
With them their secret lies, but we have known
Its likeness, nay, all true love makes the eternal ray its own.

Thus he and Nell, thus boy and girl, are met,
But slave-like slog the weights and wheels and sands
Of one who never brought a gladness yet
But with it snatched another from our hands.

There on our path resplendent Mercury stands
And smiles; to that new saviour hasten on!
We meet, then turn for him who was our guide. That guide is gone.

Schooldays were ended now for us, the last
Morning sped on to its dismissing bell;
Our treasures to the younger went broadcast,
And before all the master bade farewell.
To little boys it seemed two giants fell,
So long our reign had been; noon tolled; and then
Out of the empty room we crept to number us with men.

To number us with men! a proud, a sad,
And lonely thought that paled us, in review
Of all the health and freedom ever had,
And laughters from all sides as play came new.
What sterner porch was this that we went to,
Where few were mates, and serious was the jest,

And all in straitened channels moped and
hard care killed the best?

Such shadows of young hearts, short-
lived as those
Which smite the leaping sunshine of the
spring,
Pass on a thought, the blue revives and
glows,
The golden greens enkindle and sky-larks
sing;
And these our doubts of life on broken
wing
Passed and we felt awhile our heaven as
blue,
Our sun as warm, our songs as gay as those
before we knew.

Well-chanced it is for those who gently
go
Into man's war, with veterans left and
right
To shield their errors, that had worked
them woe
If fate had flung them to the bayonet-
fight.
Sweet luck was ours, that kept us first
in sight

Of home and that gray steeple year by year,
Nor drove us into distant streets where wisdom's bought so dear.

With quiet labour come to evening bell,
With sinewed health enjoying hours of ease,
We learned and ripened, listened and marked well,
And by these tokens pleased whom we would please ;
Found life no fury, duty no disease,
Nor less the warming praise that we might win.
But still a sigh of discontent would sometimes well within.

Even through our triumphs in their simple kind
When fortune, as we deemed, had made us strong
A twilight trouble whispered in the wind,
A foolish melancholy hushed the song ;
Days that were long had once smiled twice as long,
And for my part I made no hazard why
Yet surely read an Ichabod already in the sky.

We sat among the jovial cricketers
In the horsed brake that drove up hill, down dale,
Leaving our crestfallen competitors
To alchemize defeat with nut-brown ale;
Loud roared our laughter on the scarce-told tale,
And labourers lifted up their husky jaws
To give 'The Old Arm Chair,' and all the Trojans roared applause.

On went the wheels, the din aroused the owls
From meadow oaks immantled with brown shade;
The wheelwright spoke 'There's none played Tommy's bowls'
And 'You young stonewall' (this to me) 'You played
As pretty as a master of the trade.'
Pleased beyond measure we presaged renown
As from the wooded climb the road came out upon the down.

Fearful that vision! Groves crouched in the deep
Of valley-mist; alone, uncertain shone

The stilly river in his miles of sleep,
And signals glowed where murmuring trains were gone ;
Beyond, the coppiced loneliness rose on
To fringe with purlieus the black domes and spires
On a deep blue where voiceless lightning played in pallid fires.

From this great valley of so many farms
Came any voice but some few sleepy cries ?
Sleep held the valley in her ancient arms ;
Even deeper sleep had closed what enterprize
Of youth and age ! had hid from fame's weak eyes
The names and faces of what conquering men !
Out of the valley drearily came that sad sense on us then.

And O the dumb mad travailing afar,
The ecstasy of mysteries that flew
A second's flight, with augury of war
In heaven, a shadow-show of terrors due!
Watching this wild work all the roistering grew

Silent; and we from our slack hand let fall
The newgot flowers of praise to strew vanity's funeral.

Why such remembrance, say you? and why dwell
On a brief mood?—It lasted long with me.
My friend had peace and refuge in his Nell,
But I had none to bear my lethargy,
And with the heart's lamp make the phantoms flee.
And he, he had his Nell; and I, alone,
Found a grave Preacher by a pool or on a churchyard stone.

From the lit prospect more and more I turned,
And knew no answer in a summer's day;
Already was the false-famed phœnix burned,
The rainbow seraph found in death's dismay!
These wintry elegies the spring will play,
Errors of ecstasy, for an April hour;
Again the eaves make moan and pools are saddened with the shower.

Now the day comes that drives me from
the fold
Of this my village, parts me from my
friend;
Now with the new at hand I see the old
In its true beauty, now I comprehend
How much I loved this life come to an
end.
It was a day that drew as suddenly near
As drifting boats are tugged at last down to
the glutting weir.

I took farewell of folks I knew, I went
To take farewell of streets and streams
and lanes
Where early joy had trilled, nor well
content
Found no hours left to look on further
plains,
Our ponds, our finger-posts, our kilns,
our vanes
All speaking of the laughing vanished
time—
But now the church clock tolled me on and
grange bell's music-chime.

Heavy the day was grown, the autumn
near

In stillness and in shade masked his advance,
The water gleamed not on the blackened weir,
The aspens drooped forgetful of their dance.
Rooks half-asleep cawed, lighted as by chance
Beside the creviced path my friend and Nell
And I were on, across these leas, lengthening that farewell.

And all the way I thought old pleasures strove
To speak themselves, but there was nothing clear;
The mind's eye, misty with the tears of love
Parted, was conscious of them thronging here,
But no distinct voice rung in fancy's ear.
The barren journey hastened by this Ring,
'Past, lost!' the thin vague voices of the sluices seemed to sing.

And all too soon, the chiefest left unsaid,
Chilled by the day, they saw me in the train.
Then was the bloom of spring's amazement shed,
No more green twilights in the ferny lane,
Gathering roses dropt with new-fallen rain
To greet a child alliance happy-hearted.
How bright old flowertides shone! and I was from their coast departed.

Gently the swollen cloud is floated on,
The true heaven glitters there in sweet surprise,
We look, and now the thunder-shroud is gone,
Far phalanx wings are thridding open skies.
Out of remorse I saw resolve arise,
The day of my migration, my soul's dear,
Well may be marked a happy day in a most happy year.

In lonely envy for a thought's brief spell,
I had looked upon my friend, whose lot was cast

With the deep trusting meeting love of
Nell,
And in these dearest fields from first to
last
If so he would; and while I gleaned the
past
You like the gleaning Ruth stood in my
way
And turned my stubble-fields to gold for
ever and a day.

Sometimes came letters from my friend,
who told
Of harvest, feast and fair, of ancient men
Dismounted, headstoned, farm and
business sold,
Some lovers wed, some lost to love again;
And, chance, his pleasant Nell would
take the pen
And bid me still be ready, and to come
A longed-for guest when that old church
would make them bride and groom.

Through the four seasons of these happy
isles
And lands beyond the changeless
changing seas
Myriads like those were walking then all
smiles,

Whispering their vows below moon-haunted trees,
Listening the sureness echoing over the leas
Of holy bells soon to be set a-ringing
For very brooks to chime and hills and vales break into singing.

What cloud is this that startles the good year?
There was a speck on the horizon's bloom
Scarce seen, an hour ago; now huge, now drear,
Now blasting reason, hangs the vulture gloom,
And maniac wailings of immense simoom
Are pouring through the universe. Arise!
The fury of the tempest war is on you.—
The red dies

From cheek and lip new-vowed to love and life,
While the world plunges, and the world's youth goes
To meet what may be; in the roar of strife
Dreamed marriage bells are still, and no priest knows
If ever to be heard above earth's throes.

Then the blood flows again, the mastering mind
Burns steady in the lover marching, the lone love left behind.

For us, the parting under those storm-skies
Was such, and at my last yearned look of you
You would not weep, as though war's cunning eyes
Would leer to see love's tear; you lived it through.
But as the train from the dim platform drew
I saw you swooning to your mother's breast
And knew what love was, and was sure that man is to be blest.

But to my friend again. He too was gone
From love's possessing into that close haze
Of Flanders whence the voice of guns roared on
To hold love breathless and make years of days;
Month after month dragged by; his destined ways

Though neighbouring mine, not for a moment crossed,
Month after month we lived astonished through the holocaust.

Then the two friends a moment come together,
Strange luck, together, in the weary gloom
Of endless battle set to scowling weather,
Of death-in-life and unescapable doom.
As I sat drinking in an inn's thronged room
Muffled in late disaster's lingering mood,
A voice beside me shook me, there my old companion stood.

And then what crowded talking of the past
And with swift-flashing hope, of you, of Nell,
Of life's rewards since we had written last!—
But from such jubilant chords the song soon fell
As all our grief and terrors came to tell.
The walls about us jarred, our aching bones
Jarred to the giant guns dragged gnashing over the skull-like stones.

Gun after gun, wheel after crawling wheel,
Trooped on through that ancestral rustic town,
The pale sun like a coward touched the steel,
Then hid again, again dun rain slid down,
The rocking lorries splashed the white walls brown,
And our glad meeting words, that would have flown
Home sure as weary birds, were worse moiled in war's monotone.

Before us both his deadly landscape spread,
The maimed land would not let us look elsewhere,
The half-shut eyes of a sweet country dead
Froze the mind's deeps with unforgettable stare.
The drumming din so beat upon the ear,
Old voices but an idiot twittering seemed.
War only was; and we were war's; and all besides was dreamed.

So swift the precious time was lost while we
Called up the nightmare landmarks of the line,

The saps, the keeps, the raid's mad misery,
The roaring toppling fountain of the mine,
And miracles of crucifix or shrine
That like ourselves had lingered on—but, sure,
All these and all must fall at last to the endless flail of war.

'Miracles never happen,' said my friend,
And 'They may happen, and they do,' said I,
'But we shall need some few before the end;
The first seven years—,' and so we put this by
And from our wine borrowed a brighter sky,
Going out thence towards the thunderous east,
Between the lines of Flemish signs and windows trinket-drest.

I to my camp and he to his diverged
Where wild shells snouting up the harmless loam
Were wailing over and shouting drivers urged

Their well-loved mules ahead.—'To all
at home!'
Between ourselves and home, what leagues
to come
Of calculating death in hellfire
mangling,
Of sloughs, of sleepless pangs, of Golgothas,
of spirit-strangling.

There's the great chateau, that grey hump
of stones,
And here's the church, these craters of
red sludge;
His uniform hangs loose about his bones!
How scarlet's his gaped mouth! his eyes,
grey smudge—
The frost has kept him well. See how
they drudge,
A Company, poor old Serjeant Bell's
a-weeping,
For half of One Platoon left in the smashed
redoubt—they're sleeping!

Two hit,—they've surely spotted the
relief;
The five-nines drop like hail, my hot
scalp creeps,—
God, man, we're going out; we'll get
there—if!

Down in the trench! The pouncing
shrapnel sweeps
Past the bowed shoulders, fusecaps
whack the heaps
Beside, while they fight with the lapping
slime,
In tears and curses towards their rest, and
return in two days' time.

No, I'll no more of that; let that remain
Where it can never fade, being branded
there
In my deep agonies;—my selfish vein
Would have it haunt those whom I hold
most dear!
Forgive me that, pretend to smile, say
clear,
Miracles are no legends nor decoys
Contrived in simpler days to witch the
world to faith's employs.

For there's a wonder, that from all the
wild
We came alive to find some first hopes
crowned:
Pelion on Ossa easier had been piled
Than flesh and blood got through that
woeful ground.
And happiness redoubles, that we found

My friend who thought me still in Flanders clay
Wedded to Nell, and all their life promising to be May.

Their bond takes form, they will not fail, but grow
In the serenity of this rich vale,
With folks about them yet who used to show
Kindness in early days, now aged and hale:
Round the bright hearth their children will regale
Their pretty minds as with a twinkling eye
Their father tells the Homeric tales of our first liberty.

And in the round of labour and love-cheer,
There will be feasts and blithe conventicles,
The grand occasions of the rural year,
The fairs, the clubs, the church's festivals,
And there the nation's far-heard chronicles

Will with a quiet mind be heard and
weighed ;
Their life will be : God feared, the King
honoured, the Law obeyed.

The cottage where those two friends live
must long
Enchant the wanderer's envying eye, as
ours,
And from their damson trees the black-
cap's song
Shall swell the anthem of their crowding
flowers ;
Husbandry's glass will measure out their
hours,
And every honest mind that sees their
home
Will go his way refreshed with such riches
in little room.

So may it prove ! So may the nymphs
that haunt
These iris'd waters, or these colonnades
Of lullabying trees, make them their
chant
To the budding hearts of future youths
and maids

That shall be walking in their suns and
shades;
And they shall hear, unguessing whence
or how,
Sweet gusts of inward song, old fame, and
wreathe glad vow with vow.

Over the green the hour is tolling sweet,
The anvils chime in the forge, the
children run
From school with shrill delight down
sleepy street:
There where the last wall's pear-tree takes
the sun
See the red bonnets and quaint caps
come on.
Surely the wide lea trembles as they
pass,
And it is earth-born joy that's whispering
through the rushy grass.

That hourbell rings to tell me, I must
leave
Once more the world that housed me
homely of old,
But this day's parting shall not make me
grieve,
Love's joy increases joy a hundredfold.

For one flower withered, look, what
hosts unfold !
And I shall part contented at dewfall
Having one theme that passes this, my spirit's
pastoral.

HERE ENDS · A SUMMER'S FANCY · B
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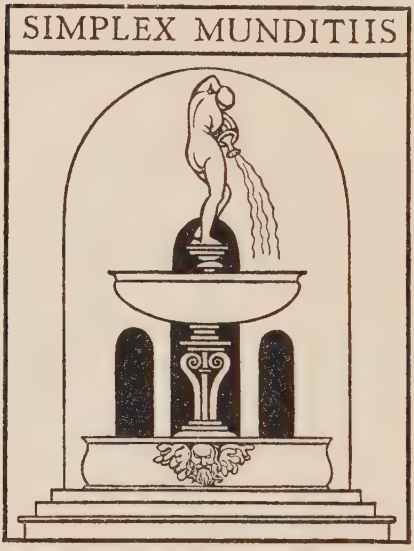

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